

**TAKE**  
*in the*  
**GOOD**

SKILLS FOR STAYING POSITIVE  
AND LIVING YOUR BEST LIFE

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Shambhala  
*Boulder*  
2020

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# INTRODUCTION

## A GUIDE TO YOUR WELL-BEING

Marian Wright Edelman, the founder of the Children’s Defense Fund, says, “We have pushed so many of our children into the tumultuous sea of life in small and leaky boats without survival gear and compass.” So the question is, do we—whether as teens or even adults—have a road map to the skills and tools necessary for well-being, for taking in the good, and for living our best lives? How can we engage in self-care, positive coping skills, or taking in the good if we have never been taught? When do any of us learn the crucial skills for living our best life? It is my belief that mindfulness and taking in the good are the “survival gear and compass” needed for navigating and living your best life.

This book is intended primarily for a teenage audience, but the skills presented herein are not necessarily things that an adult may have already mastered. We can learn these skills to take in the good whether young or old, and once learned, they can be used for a lifetime. They will have a different meaning to you at different stages of your life, but they can be used by anyone from 12 to 112.

For the past fifteen years, my work and focus has been on adapting Jon Kabat-Zinn’s adult Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program for teens. I created the teen-adapted program, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction for Teens (MBSR-T) in 2004. Learning mindfulness and bringing it into your daily life, whether as a teen or an adult, is invaluable.

### *Origins of “Take in the Good”*

This focus on turning toward beneficial experiences and making them a part of ourselves is grounded in the work of Rick Hanson, a neuropsychologist and author who coined the term “taking in the good.” In his books and programs, Dr. Hanson has highlighted the brain’s negativity bias—it’s like Velcro for

bad experiences but Teflon for good ones, as he puts it—and developed structured methods that we can use in everyday life to change the brain for the better. With his blessing and support, I have drawn on and adapted his ideas and tools for this book, including those I learned about in his Positive Neuroplasticity Training.

I wish I had learned about mindfulness and these practices when I was a teen.

# MINDFULNESS

- is -

NOTICING YOUR

Thoughts, feelings,  
and

PHYSICAL SENSATIONS

- in the -

PRESENT MOMENT

WITHOUT

HARMFUL JUDGMENT

# NEUROPLASTICITY

is the ability of the brain to change by creating and reorganizing  
: NEURAL CONNECTIONS, :  
especially in response to learning or experience.

## POSITIVE NEUROPLASTICITY

is the process by which the brain changes in response to experience, particularly with regard to positive or pleasurable experiences.

By attending to positive or pleasurable experiences, you can create  
: NEURAL CONNECTIONS :  
that tilt toward the positive.

# A GUIDE TO TAKE IN THE GOOD

Mindfulness helps set the foundations for being able to take in the good because you must be in the present to do so. *Mindfulness* is defined as noticing your thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations in the present moment without harmful judgment. Mindfulness practices help people live in the now by being more present and aware to what is unfolding moment by moment. The intention is that people who are more mindful will focus less on what happened in the past and what is going to happen in the future. This is useful because thoughts on the past or the future are generally connected to worries, ruminations, judgments, doubts, guilt, shame, and the like.

Something I have learned to consider is that once people become more mindful—aware of their thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations—where do they put their attention? Once people are more mindful and aware, what do they do with that newfound awareness and attention? Do they use it to take in the good or do they take in the bad?

## *The Value of Taking in the Good: The Role of Neuroplasticity*

*Neuroplasticity* is the ability of the brain to change by creating and reorganizing neural connections, especially in response to learning or experience. Leading-edge research on neuroplasticity shows that depending on how the brain is used, the brain can grow approximately fourteen hundred new neurons a day and can create a myriad of new neural connections. The brain continues to change and develop throughout one's life in response to how it is used. These new neurons and neural connections can be harnessed for the good or the bad. You are more likely to attend to the bad because that is the way you are wired.

Due to our evolutionary history, we are wired to fight, freeze, or flee when encountering danger. Though we may not encounter saber-toothed tigers, our

brains respond to daily stressors and other traumatic events as if we did. To protect us from harm, our brains are biologically wired to attend to whatever isn't working right, to anything that is bad or negative—this is referred to as the brain's *negative selection bias*. Your brain is more likely to see and focus in on the negative rather than the positive. It can be even harder to harness and take in the good as your brain has evolved to take in the bad. Without deliberate effort and skill, you might perpetuate the natural tendency to focus in on the negative—a taking in of the “bad”—and grow neural connections that further support the negative selection bias.

The good news is that you have the opportunity—every day—to attend to and focus on the good instead of the automatic tendency toward the bad. You can train your brain to focus on and attend to the positive—the act of “taking in the good” to enhance your well-being. *Taking in the good* is the process of noticing, attending to, and taking in a beneficial or “good” experience as it is occurring. We can teach our brains to tilt more to the positive with active training, which is what this book will help you harness. The brain is a sponge, particularly with positive or pleasurable experiences. Research shows us that positive self-talk, thinking, and actions can wash through our brain and shift us away from the negative selection bias. This is why it is so important to actively engage and be present with healthy, positive experiences—so you can learn to construct rather than destruct. By focusing and attending to the positive, you are helping to form positive neuroplasticity.

*Positive neuroplasticity* is the process by which the brain changes in response to experiences, particularly with regard to positive or pleasurable ones. When we notice, attend to, and take in good, pleasant, and positive moments, we are shifting away from the negative and toward the positive. It takes deliberate effort to notice and recognize good things, and this book provides a map of ways to do just that—to notice, take in, and savor the sweetness life has to offer. Research suggests that—despite our evolution—we can in fact learn how to be more mindful in our lives and then turn that newfound attention toward taking in the good and focusing on the positive.

We have the capacity to see the extraordinary in the ordinary—it is all

in the way we choose to look at things and perceive our world. Making this shift in perspective happen isn't always easy, but it can be done. We can train our mind just like we build muscles; we just need to commit to taking the time, putting in the effort, and doing the practice. Using the skills in this book can help. We have the power every day to decide where we want to put our attention and focus. Rick Hanson said, "Taking in the good is not about putting a happy shiny face on everything, nor is it about turning away from the hard things in life. It's about nourishing well-being, contentment, and peace inside that are refuges you can always come from and return to." Give yourself permission to want good things for yourself and to take in the good your life has to offer every single day. It is a healthy thing to want good things for yourself.

### *How to Use This Guidebook*

I suggest that you work through the chapters in the order they are presented. The skills in this book are progressive and build upon one another, and many are tied to you having worked through the previous activities. You can use the road map on the next few pages as an overview to provide for your well-being. This map lays out how to take in the good and live your best life.

In the middle of each page you will see a bird with a ribbon that says *Take in the Good: Take Action*; this is the core of each activity.

To facilitate taking in the good, you need your survival gear and compass to navigate living your best life. You will see a *Take in the Good: Takeaway* and a compass at the end of each activity. The takeaways are quick points to consider for a given activity. The takeaway might include a sentence to help you remember an important point, or it might ask you to do something in your day that can help make an activity more useful and valuable to you. The compass was chosen because each activity guides you toward enhanced and deeper well-being to live your best life.





In each of the four cardinal directions—north, south, east, and west—you will see the following symbols: an anchor, a brain, a flower, and a heart.



The anchor represents the foundations of mindfulness. These include anchoring ourselves in the present moment, being aware of and choosing where to put our attention, noticing our senses, and attending to our grounding focal points. The anchor reminds us that even when we are in a boat and there are lots of waves around us, *stress waves*, when we drop an anchor from our boat, deep below the surface it is calm and still. This anchor helps ground us and gets us to our calm, still place.



The brain represents neuroplasticity and positive neuroplasticity and stands for our becoming more deeply aware of the landscape of our mind—our thoughts and feelings. It reminds us of our ability to change our brain depending on how we use it. We can use our brain to take in the good instead of our natural hardwiring that tilts us toward the negative.



The flower represents our ability to plant seeds so we can nourish and support ourselves while also pulling weeds—ridding ourselves of things that drain and deplete us. We can learn to grow flower bouquets as resources for ourselves in hard times, just as we can value the weeds we have in order to learn from them.



The heart represents tuning in to our hearts—getting to our heart space and out of our head space. We can come from an attitude of gratitude, self-compassion, self-love, and self-care. We can get to know what our needs are—both basic and fundamental, and work at getting those needs met.

I offer you compassion, blessings, and love on this journey of growth, discovery, and living well.

I leave you with this quote I heard from my colleague Talya Vogel, “We have to know where we are in order to know where we want to go!”

Warmly,  
Gina Biegel

# THE ROAD MAP TO TAKING IN THE GOOD

FIRST  
You Need:  
SURVIVAL GEAR  
and a  
COMPASS



SURVIVAL GEAR  
+ COMPASS  
LEADS TO  
AN OVERALL  
SENSE OF

WELL-BEING

WELL-BEING  
is achieved  
by a  
constellation  
of different  
things.

WELL-BEING BANK



WHAT IS PART  
OF YOUR  
BANK?

- Do things you enjoy doing
- Engage in self-care activities
- Utilize positive coping skills
- Plant seeds - fill yourself with things that nourish and support you

# & LIVING YOUR BEST LIFE

Taking in the good provides for your well-being!

When you notice, attend, and hold on to the good for a minimum of 30 seconds you get to enjoy what you are doing as you are doing it, but you also get...

## RESOURCE YOURSELF

to support and nourish yourself during difficult times. In this way you are filling up your...

When you do these things, your WELL-BEING BANK will be overflowing.

⊕ Pull weeds - rid yourself of things that drain and deplete you.

⊕ Get your Human Needs met

↳ Basic and Fundamental Needs to feel safe, satisfied, and connected.

